

He fishes with worms



Tips from the Posse

By Mark Rackay

Serious fishing people often become infected with a disease called “purist.” Personally, I can’t understand the fanaticism of the dry fly purist. These people feel that anyone who doesn’t fish with a dry fly is on the moral level of a pickpocket or sneak thief.

While it may be true you don’t want to come busting into the clubhouse, holding a 10-pound-plus rainbow trout, and tell everyone you caught it on a nightcrawler, bait fishing does have a place in our sport.

As a kid raised by my grandparents, money did not exactly flow freely. I spent most of my free time, and some of my not-so-free time when I should have been in school, in pursuit of trout on the creeks near our place. While I would have loved to chase them with a 4-wt. fly rod and a book of custom-tied English dry flies, I had to make do with an old Zebco outfit, hook, sinker, and live bait.

The bait in those days was whatever I could dig up. My grandfather was not about to fork over hard-earned cash for a container of worms at the store, so it was up to me and a shovel. My grandmother would tell me that the ground behind the tool shed would be a good place for me to go dig

around for worms. I’d spade up half an acre over the next 2 hours and find 4 scrawny little worms. The next day, my grandmother would plant her garden where I spaded up the ground. So much for trusting the old woman.

The most common worm we affectionately call the nightcrawler, or *Lumbricus terrestris*, and they are the largest earthworm found in Colorado. The nightcrawler is not even native to Colorado, as he comes from Europe and Asia.

Nightcrawlers are widespread in Colorado, usually in association with lawns and gardens. Distribution is usually related to human movement of them to other locations. Once the worm becomes established at a particular site, they may spread only a few yards away annually.

There are 14 species of earthworms, including the nightcrawler, that live in Colorado, and none of them are native. The worms currently found here are those that were incidentally introduced from Europe or were native to other parts of North America and subsequently introduced into Colorado within the past 150 years.

The nightcrawler is an anecic species of earthworm, creating permanent burrows and foraging for food on the surface of the ground. Because the burrows are below the frost line, often a yard or more deep, nightcrawlers can survive the winter. The optimum temperature range for nightcrawlers is about 68 degrees F. Any temperatures above 85 degrees F will kill them eventually, so they tend to stay deeper underground during the summer months.

As with most earthworms, the nightcrawler



My friend Ryan Gildehaus claims he caught this beautiful trout on a hand tied fly, but I am pretty sure he used worms. (Courtesy photo/Mark Rackay)

mates on the surface of the ground. The nightcrawler is a hermaphrodite, possessing both male and female sex organs, although they must pair with another nightcrawler to fertilize the eggs carried in the clitellum, the thicker band on the front half of the worm.

The fertilized eggs will slip off the worm in a small cocoon that will produce 2 to 20 baby earthworms, generally emerging 3 weeks after the cocoon is shed. The egg hatch can be delayed or extended for considerable amounts of time if the conditions are not favorable. Young nightcrawlers form their own burrows, extending as they grow, not reaching full maturity until they are 3 years old. Nightcrawlers typically live 6 or 7 years and produce 2 or 3 cocoons a month during favorable conditions and

active periods.

The other type of earthworm found in Colorado are of the endogeic type, the red worm being an example. These types of worms are usually found in manure or composting piles and do not burrow below the frost line, and rarely survive a winter.

The nightcrawler is a familiar animal to fisherpersons all across the country. They are a favored fishing bait for just about any freshwater fish. Nightcrawlers can be used for walleye with a June Bug spinner, a Lindy rig for bass, or just with a plain hook and sinker for trout in lakes and streams.

Nightcrawlers are sold as bait under several names, such as Canadian nightcrawlers, European/Belgian nightcrawlers, dew worms, or walleye crawlers, but it can be more fun to catch your own before a fishing

trip. Ideal conditions would be during a humid evening when the worms are on the surface foraging, or an overcast night after a soaking rain or lawn watering.

Use a flashlight but keep it low and try to not shine the light directly on the worm, as they will quickly retreat back into their burrows. Move slowly, and light-footed, as they are sensitive to vibrations and footsteps can cause them to retreat.

Most people head to the bait shop and buy fishing worms in little plastic containers. That practice was forbidden by my grandparents, so I had to gather and dig my own. I saw no shame in using live bait as a kid but admit I might have become a bit snobby about it later in my fishing career.

Whenever I landed a big tarpon in the Keys, it was usually on a fly or a lure, but

never on a worm. You see, the Keys are just big coral islands that have no topsoil, so worms don’t live there. If I could have dug some worms down there, maybe it would have been different. Then again, I probably would not have admitted to using worms for bait.

Mark Rackay is a columnist for the Montrose Daily Press, Delta County Independent, and several other newspapers, as well as a feature writer for several saltwater fishing magazines. He is an avid hunter and world class saltwater angler, who travels around the world in search of adventure and serves as a director and public information officer for the Montrose County Sheriff’s Posse. Personal email is elkhunter77@icloud.com For information about the posse call 970-765-7033 (leave a message) or email info@mcspi.org

Dan Ben-Horin begins new role as BLM Uncompahgre field manager

SPECIAL TO THE MDP

Dan Ben-Horin is starting his new role as field manager for the Bureau of Land Management Uncompahgre Field Office in Montrose.

Ben-Horin will oversee the multiple use management of nearly 900,000 acres of public land and over 2.3 million acres of federal mineral estate in BLM Colorado’s Southwest District.

The field office encompasses portions of four river systems and supports a diverse landscape ranging from lowland riparian along the Dolores River to piñon-juniper woodlands adorning the Uncompahgre Plateau.

Within the field office boundary, the Gunnison Gorge National Conservation Area protects a moonscape of highly eroded Mancos shale badlands. At its heart lies the Gunnison Gorge Wilderness, a dramatic black granite and red sandstone double canyon carved by the Gunnison River.

In addition, the field office shares with the BLM Grand Junction Field Office in the management of the spectacular Dominguez-Escalante National Conservation Area.

Ben-Horin is well known to many in western Colorado, where he served as the National Conservation Lands specialist for the Grand Junction Field Office since 2016. During that time, he emphasized community involvement in managing public

lands and took on a number of temporary assignments that bolstered his BLM leadership experience.

“We are so pleased to welcome Dan to the BLM Colorado Southwest District from our neighboring Upper Colorado River District,” said District Manager Stephanie McCormick.

“His diverse background in public lands management will be a perfect fit for the wide range of great work being accomplished in the Uncompahgre Field Office. We’re especially excited to gain Dan’s appreciation for the value of robust collaboration with our partners and the public.”

Ben-Horin holds a Bachelor of Business Administration from

Hofstra University and a Master of Urban and Regional Planning, with a concentration in land use and environmental planning, from the University of Colorado Denver. In addition, he is a graduate of the Presidential Management Fellowship class of 2016 and part of BLM’s Emerging Leaders class of 2023.

He is married to his best friend Amy, a small business owner and animal lover. In their free time, they relish exploring the public lands of western Colorado.

“It is an honor to join the Uncompahgre Field Office team and I’m thrilled to be working with such a passionate and dedicated staff,” said Ben-Horin. “The UFO has spectacular public land resources and I’m looking forward



Dan Ben-Horin

to creating meaningful relationships with our local communities and partners to ensure their sound management.”

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